

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00092 201351Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0092

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: EARLY REFERENDUM?

1. CLAUDE MORIN ON MARCH 16 STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT
"REFERENDUM WILL BE HELD BEFORE ANOTHER PROVINCIAL ELECTION
IS CALLED." STATEMENT WAS MADE IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION FROM
AUDIENCE FOLLOWING SPEECH MORIN DELIVERED TO GROUT COMPOSED
MAINLY OF REPRESENTATIVES OF CANADIAN AND MULTI-NATIONAL
COMPANIES. PQ BACKBENCHER MADE SIMILAR STATEMENT TO CONOFF
COMMENT THAT LIBERALS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING RUMORS TO EFFECT
THAT PQ INTENDS CALL EARLY ELECTION WITHOUT HOLDING PROMISED
REFERENDUM. HE TERMED THIS "WISHFUL THINKING" ON PART OF LIBERALS.

2. WHEN I ASKED POLLING SPECIALIST MAURICE PINARD MARCH 15
WHETHER HE HAD HEARD RUMORS OF IMPENDING ELECTION, HE SCOFFED
AT IDEA. HE SHARES OUR VIEW EXPRESSED IN MONTREAL - THAT PQ
IS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO REFERENDUM DURING PRESENT MANDATE.
UNDER ANY FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, PARTY WOULD RISK DEVAS-
TATING PUBLIC REACTION AT POLLS SHOULD IT DECIDE NOT TO HOLD
REFERENDUM.

3. PINARD ADDED THAT PROVINCIAL ELECTION HELD IN NEAR FUTURE
LIKELY BE SUICIDAL FOR PQ. LATEST POLLS, ONE BY IQOP AND
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00092 201351Z

ANOTHER LEAKED TO PRESS BY PQ, TEND CONFIRM THAT PQ POPULARITY
HAS DECLINED DRAMATICALLY IN RECENT MONTHS WHILE SUPPORT FOR
LIBERALS HAS STRENGTHENED. (SEE MONTREAL 463) MOREOVER,
ANTI-SEPARTIST VOTE IS NOT AGAIN LIKELY SPLIT AS IT DID IN 1976
ELECTION ALLOWING PQ WIN LARGE MAJORITY OF SEATS IN ASSEMBLY
WHILE ONLY POLLING 41 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE.

4. RATHER THAN AN ELECTION, PINARD SUGGESTS LEVESQUE AND HIS COLLEAGUES MAY BE TEMPTED HOLD EARLY REFERENDUM EITHER THIS COMING SUMMER OR, MORE LIKELY, IN AUTUMN. THIS WOULD GIVE THEM ADVANTAGE OF "CLEARING THE AIR" OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY AND WOULD ALLOW SOME TWO YEARS TO PREPARE VOTERS FOR ELECTION WITHOUT DAMOCLESEAN REFERENDUM THREATENINGLY POISED OVER THEIR HEADS. TO ME, THIS SCENARIO SEEMS MORE LOGICAL THAN AN EARLY ELECTION. IF INDEED PQ SHARES CONCLUSION WITH PINARD ON BASIS THEIR OWN POLLING ANALYSIS THAT REFERENDUM HELD ON QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY ASSOCIATION IS FOREDOOMED AS LONG AS PRESENT ECONOMIC RECESSION PERSISTS, THEN POLITICAL SURVIVAL WOULD SEEM DICTATE AT PRESENT THEIR FOCUSING ON STAYING IN POWER WHILE PREPARING FACE NEXT ELECTIO N UNDER MOST PROMISING CIRCUMSTANCES. SINCE THEY ARE SO DEEPLY COMMITTED IN ELECTORATES EYES TO HOLDING REFERENDUM BUT NOT NECESSARILY WINNING IT, THEY MIGHT BETTER ACCEPT EARLY REFERENDUM LOSS WITH HOPE OF REBUILDING ELECTORAL POPULARITY BY AGAIN DEEMPHASIZING SEPARATIST INTENTIONS. MCNAMARA

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